
The Right Tool: MAIC Information Services and Support Products

By

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In the Spring 2000 issue of the *DISAM Journal*, we introduced the organizational history, structure and functions of the Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) at James Madison University that is under the direction of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs (HA/D). The MAIC was created in 1996 by the Department of Defense to utilize the unique academic talents and capabilities of a university to perform as an information service and support clearinghouse of landmine-related information. Though the focus and priority is with deploying U.S. military trainers, the Center serves the international community as well.

Over the last four years the MAIC has created and distributed a wide variety of products and support materials to international mine action organizations and activities. These products are designed, developed and produced by the students, staff, and faculty of the University based on their interaction with key members and events around the world. The objective of the process is to ensure the mine action community has a central place to go for information collection, processing, and dissemination. Experience with specific subject matter areas also allows some analysis and methodologies to be generated by the MAIC itself.

The media are produced in a wide variety of published, electronic, and multimedia formats. The recognition that many users may not be using current technologies keeps the consideration of access and availability at the forefront during development, production, and release of these materials. For instance, we may be certain that a CD-ROM runs on equipment available to U.N. operations but possibly not on equipment available to non-governmental organizations conducting mine awareness programs along the Pakistani border in Kashmir. Where possible, both electronic and paper copies of most products are considered.

Internet Web Site

The most important tool available for quickly distributing and hosting a wide variety of information and sources is on the internet. The MAIC web site is <http://maic.jmu.edu> and has been active since the summer of 1997. A considerable amount of planning and coordination with the international community went into the design of this site and it continues to be responsive to the needs of the international mine action community. During 2001, a survey will be conducted with customers of the site to ensure that our focus remains on the most urgent information needs and that our efforts and limited resources are targeted in the most effective manner. We have received a number of extremely flattering comments about our site and are proud of the prominence it has gained both at the highest levels of the U.S. government and internationally.

In addition to current news items appearing in the "What's New?" area, users have access to all of the *Journal of Mine Action* issues that have been published by the MAIC since September 1997. A search engine targeted and structured with pre-coded search strings also allows the user

to find other internet sites of specific interest much faster without having to master complex internet search syntax in the process. Sections on various U.S. government departments also point the users to specific U.S. efforts and initiatives. The calendar of global mine action conferences, symposia and meetings has been called the most definitive and complete schedule available either on the internet or in hard copy. Modifications to the site are constantly occurring and updates are prioritized based on user need, student/faculty availability, and resources required.

Specific topics of more defined interest can also be captured in sections in a well-structured and responsive site. The geographic information systems spatial information clearinghouse for humanitarian demining available through the home page is a prototype effort intended to provide the basis for an expanded source in the coming year. Discussions are underway with the U.S. State Department, United Nations, and European Union concerning the needs of the community and the next steps in this very important effort.

Another specific site available through the MAIC home page is a link to the MAIC mine awareness project we ran in Quang Tri, Vietnam for eighteen months under a U.S. State Department grant. This three phase effort provided display materials, curriculum development, and specified training to the Women's Union of Quang Tri and support to the Provincial People's Committee in building and maintaining and stable mine awareness effort to complement the recently begun landmine and unexploded ordnance clearance efforts there as well.

Special Studies and Reports

There have been eight special studies and reports issued by the MAIC and all have been targeted at specific issues of concern to either the U.S. effort or the international community. The latest, *The Role of Civil Affairs in Mine Action*, has been well received by the U.S. Army's Civil Affairs trainers and is in significant enough demand by military units and schools that an additional printing of 500 copies was needed to meet the demand. Other studies deal with a wide variety of topics such as developing lessons-learned methodologies, humanitarian demining requirements analysis, health resources in the global landmine community, an evaluation of geographic information systems available to meet demining management needs, and a nominal mine awareness module for Mozambique that can be modified for other countries.

Product and Materials Development

The MAIC also has the capability not only to design but to produce a variety of specific tools and items that support the United States or multinational training and awareness initiatives. An early product was a set of mine awareness flashcards used in impacted communities to demonstrate the dangers posed by specific items. A novel development was the creation of a heavy duty scarf with pictograms on how to use it as a tourniquet or sling for use with landmine or accident victims. Also developed early in the program was a complete geographic information system (GIS) using Cambodian data that demonstrated how a simple modification to an off-the-shelf mapping package like *ArcView* can be easily turned into an effective mine action management tool.

Books and Pamphlets

One of the benefits of a university-supported effort is the wide variety of academic talent available. One of the earliest and most noteworthy efforts by the Mine Awareness Team of professors and students was an extremely comprehensive critical incident stress debriefing guide for use by mine clearance teams and others after an accident or incident in the field. In addition to this, the Center completed work in 1998 and published a book *Sustainable Humanitarian Demining: Trends, Techniques, and Technologies*, that was an anthology of over forty of the best writings of the time encapsulating the state of demining and thought in 1997. This book was an outgrowth of a demining conference in Zagreb, Croatia, at which the MAIC at JMU was designated as the global information by the international community filling an information void at the time and laying the foundation for the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining and others to follow in the coming years.



CD-ROM and Multimedia

A notable highlight of the early history of the MAIC and its partnership with Essex Corporation was the development and release to the U.S. government of an instructional video on treating landmine-related leg injuries. The effort and quality of this video resulted in the receipt of a Telly Award identifying it as having achieved excellence as one of the year's best non-commercial videos. A multimedia product for a mine awareness program focused on the children of Cambodia was also produced for the U.S. Department of Defense in 1997. The Madison Medialab under the JMU College of Integrated Science and Technology has also produced organizational CD-ROMs for the MAIC, U.S. State Department and DSCA offices of humanitarian demining programs. These CD-ROMs continue to be an excellent outreach tool for widening the awareness of the significant scope of activities of the U.S. government in mine action around the world.

Periodicals

There is little debate that the most widely recognized publication today dealing with land mines and mine action in general is the MAIC's *Journal of Mine Action*. This excellent magazine is produced three times a year in both electronic (on-line) and hard copy and goes to every key organization and individual around the globe engaged in daily efforts to make the world mine safe. The *Journal* is thematic but covers a wide variety of topics and issues with each release. We are expanding the subscription database and popularity of the magazine has greatly improved both the quantity and quality of articles and photos being submitted from around the world. The Editor of the *Journal*, Maggie Busé, has done an excellent job developing and working with an all-student staff to make this world-class information tool available at no cost to U.S. trainers and the global community.

The MAIC has also entered into an agreement with the Canadian Centre for Mine Action Technologies (CCMAT) in Medicine Hat, Canada, to host their *Demining Technologies Information Forum Journal* which will, as the name implies, focus on new technologies and their use in detection, remediation or simply improving deminer safety and quality assurance. The first issue of the *Demining Technologies Information Forum Journal* should be available early in 2001. The scientific facility at CCMAT is one of the world's finest and will likely become a key part of the international test and evaluation program established by a number of countries, including the U.S., as a focus for new mine technologies.

Conference Proceedings

As part of its on-going support to the U.S. effort, the MAIC regularly hosts and conducts conferences and symposia on specific and tightly-focused mine action topics. The documented proceedings of these meetings are captured and made available to the international community both in hard copy and as a special section electronically through our internet homepage. Past conferences have dealt with non-government organization perspectives, mapping/GIS issues, and operator's perspective, standards and measures of success, and a workshop on information coordination that laid the foundation for a more substantive international effort to come in the next year.

In support of the U.S. State Department's Humanitarian Demining Program Office (PM/HDP) and the Slovenian International Trust Fund for Demining and Victim Assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have also held two conferences on mine detecting dogs. The first was in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in September, 1999, and the follow-on was recently held in San Antonio, Texas, in October 2000. Both conferences attracted a wide variety of international dog experts and has greatly improved the global knowledge base of mine dogs and how they can be more effectively used to enhance a landmine clearance operation.

All of these products and services, as well as a growing content base on the MAIC web site, has been researched and produced by the staff, students and faculty of JMU to support and serve the U.S. training mission and the international mine action community. We are always looking for new and innovative approaches to providing our users with timely and accurate information and have maintained a focus on either having what they need or knowing who does have it. The MAIC has developed and maintains an international reputation for excellence and integrity and has been complimented for our objectivity and support of international programs, many of which may not have succeeded with the contributions of the MAIC.

As the vision for the future of the MAIC continues to evolve in both DSCA and within the Department of Defense in general, the students, staff and faculty at JMU continue to be dedicated to providing the military and U.S. government efforts with a high quality, low cost information services and support operation that meets the needs of the mission on the ground and supports solid decisions by senior leaders and the national command authorities.

For more information about these and other products, contact the MAIC at maic@jmu.edu, call (540) 568-2718, or visit our web site at <http://maic.jmu.edu>.

About the Author

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